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CORRESPONDENCE.

I.

THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK IN FRANCE.

THE return of Mme. Hyacinthe Loyson to France after her American tour, undertaken, I understand, in order to obtain new support for the Gallican church, suggests the writing of this article, which will be a brief survey, from the point of view of an American layman, of the present religious situation in France.

As Père Hyacinthe's reform has been made the peg on which to hang this article, perhaps I cannot do better than begin by an examination of the noble but fruitless labors of the eloquent ex-Carmelite. While one cannot help being carried away by the oratory of Hyacinthe Loyson and charmed with his personality, so full of wit, kindness, and gentility ; while one must admire the devotedness and earnestness of Mme. Loyson and feel much sympathy for their studious and promising son Paul, one is convinced in spite of one's self that this latter-day Gallicanism is doomed to failure if indeed it has not already failed. You have simply to visit the poor little church in the Rue d'Arras, in this city, to see what a mere handful of followers Père Hyacinthe has been able to collect in this great centre of two million people, after years of work and after preaching hundreds of magnificent sermons that would fill to overflowing the largest edifice in America, Sunday after Sunday, if delivered with similar eloquence by a divine of no matter what denomination or of no denomination at all. To the practical layman of this practical age no further demonstration is necessary in order to prove that Père Hyacinthe's mission is, as the French say, *un coup*

dans l'eau, that is, an effort which produces no result. Whenever I leave this humble church and am well out in the narrow, shabby street in which it is situated and am away from the influence of the preacher's fascination, I cannot help exclaiming, What a waste of power, What a casting of pearls before swine! And all of Mme. Loyson's enthusiastic conversation in private, her accounts of the encouraging letters received by the Père, furtively of course, from discontented priests, and her statements concerning the warm words of sympathy and support from the churchmen of foreign lands, cannot remove that abiding feeling that this rejuvenated Gallican church movement is other than a dismal failure; more than ever one exclaims: *C'est un coup dans l'eau*.

Père Hyacinthe has always received, in France as abroad, his greatest support from the Protestants. But Protestantism here in France is a sickly growth when compared, for instance, with its rich and sturdy brother in the United States. It has, at most, only a small band of followers, nearly lost to view in the vast army of Catholicism and Freethought. Furthermore, the Liberal wing is losing ground and the Orthodox wing gaining slightly, not an encouraging sign in these days to those who hope for the final triumph of faith over the growing tendency towards infidelity. The real truth is that about the only strength left in French Protestantism to-day lies in the fact that there is a certain *éclat* associated, in the eyes of the upper classes, with the being a Protestant, much as is the case in America and England, in the same rank, about being a Roman Catholic. It distinguishes you from the multitude, and in these democratic times human nature, especially when it is that of the "upper ten," is very keen for elimination from "the vulgar throng." It is difficult for an American to comprehend this peculiar little streak of innocent vanity running through certain French circles which shows itself in this wish to be known as Protestants. It is not too much to say that to the impartial outside observer this phase of the French Protestantism of to-day is the one that first strikes the eye; which goes to prove in a peculiar but significant manner the weak hold, on the one hand, which the doctrine of Luther and Calvin now has on the French nation, and, on the other hand, how uni-

versal must be scepticism, freethought, and utter indifference to church and religion of every kind.

If native French Protestantism exerts so little influence on the nation, it is easy to imagine the excessive futility of the work of the foreign missionary. There is a great deal said in American and religious circles about the labors in France of the Salvation Army, the McAll Mission, the Young Men's Christian Association, etc. I have received more than one letter from would-be subscribers in the United States asking me if these and other similar organisations were really accomplishing all that they pretend. My reply is invariably that if you regard their labors as charity work some good is being done, but if money is asked for because of the religious results which have been accomplished, the demand should be considered to be arrant humbug. If Père Hyacinthe, a Frenchman and a Catholic, after forty years of labor, has accomplished next to nothing, it is easy to imagine how this nation, so reserved in its relations with the foreigner when he attempts to penetrate into its inner life, would treat Scotch and Yankee missionaries. From a religious standpoint, therefore, American money and sympathy is absolutely thrown away when it is sent to France. If it be answered that much misery and physical suffering is relieved by these foreign missions, the French might well ask if charity does not begin at home. The French are a peculiarly thrifty people. Few are poor, beggars are scarce and charitable institutions are rich and numerous. Hence devoting American dollars to the relief of French distress is much like sending coals to Newcastle, if it is not a piece of sheer impertinence, like our protesting to the Czar against his Siberian convict system when we have one quite as cruel in full swing in some of our Southern states.

And now, finally, a few paragraphs about the great Roman Catholic church of France, the only religious institution of any real first-rate importance in this country.

While it is true that the Catholic Church, at least as a church, still has a strong hold on the French nation, it is also quite true that indifference, infidelity, free thought, and atheism are on the increase. Matthew Arnold says, in his essay on Tolstoi, written in

1887: "Between the age of twenty and that of thirty-five he [Tolstoi] had lost, he tells us, the Christian belief in which he had been brought up, a loss of which examples nowadays abound certainly everywhere, but which in Russia, as in France, is among all young men of the upper and cultivated classes more a matter of course, perhaps, more universal, more avowed, than it is with us." Arnold might have enlarged, at least in the case of France, his limits and stated that in the cities the middle and lower classes, too, particularly the male portion, have abandoned Rome. One has only to visit a Paris church to be convinced of the contempt which men feel for the priesthood and religion: you can count ten female devotees for one of the masculine gender. In the village church, far away from the great centres, the priest may still have the large majority of the population, men and women alike, as faithful attendants upon service. But even here, for one man who confesses, a dozen or score of women will kneel at the chair. Then again, this more general participation in religious ceremonies by the rural population is due in a large measure to the fact that these Sunday masses and vespers are almost the only break and variety in a very dead and monotonous existence. The church is a sort of meeting place, where whole families, babies, children, and adults, congregate. The hum of idle conversation, the crying of infants, and the ardent exhortations of the priest are often mingled in a manner that would astonish and shock a pious Protestant, accustomed to the highly proper atmosphere of an Episcopalian or Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Another sign of the disfavor in which French Catholicism finds itself to-day is seen in the quality of its future priests. You have simply to look into the faces of the seminarists as they pass by you in procession in the streets of Paris to be convinced of the well-known fact that these young men are, for the most part, the faint-hearted and dull-headed sons of the peasantry, eager to escape the drudgery of farm life and not intelligent enough for business or the petty employments offered by the State.

"Anybody can make a priest," is often heard in France. The result is that just as the English army is the receptacle for the riff-

raff—the Tommy Atkinses of Rudyard Kipling's "Barrack-room Ballads"—of the cities, so the French priesthood draws most of its recruits from the scum of the farming districts. This fact contrasts strongly, by the way, with the manner in which the Protestants fill their pulpits. The young man who becomes a pastor is not looked upon by his friends and companions as a failure and a numskull. Quite the contrary; he is immediately classed among those taking a high moral stand. Some of the best families of France are descended from, or have relatives who are, clergymen, and they are quite proud of the fact; another example of that sentiment of halo surrounding French Protestantism to which reference has already been made.

Another cause of this boycotting of the cloth as a profession by the youth of the élite is due to the Church having got on the wrong side during the struggle for the foundation of the present Republic. The Catholics supported the Monarchists and Bonapartists and took an active part in the attempt to prevent the advent of republican institutions and to overthrow these institutions when they had been accepted by a majority of the nation. This unpatriotic course brought the Church into bad odor among republicans, so that the having a son in orders, for example, would be apt to be an impediment to a father aspiring to political preferment, especially if the latter belonged to the Radical or Socialist wing of the Republican army. The result is that a whole great political party is, in its general tendency, opposed to the Catholic Church.

Nor is the harm occasioned thereby limited to lowering the quality of the seminarists. It makes a vast number of intelligent and influential citizens sworn enemies of religion. Thus, when Gambetta attended funerals, he would not enter the church, but wait outside in the porch. When Louis Blanc was buried neither church nor priest participated in the pageant. On the death of Henri Martin, a free-thinking Protestant clergyman officiated at the burial service. Hundreds of other prominent Republicans, who have died or been buried since 1870, never entered a church, perhaps, except when their bodies were borne there by their families,

acting under the influence of its female members, or out of respect for public sentiment.

One of the shrewdest acts of Leo XIII. is his recent declaration in favor of the French Republic. He not only accepts the situation, but has ordered the faithful, both ecclesiastical and lay, in France to do likewise. But this demand has not been complied with without a murmur. More than one priest and noble has shown himself more ultramontane than the Pope. The important fact remains true, however, that officially the Vatican recognises the political change in France, and, though the Republicans, particularly those of the Radical camp, are wary of these new converts and still believe with Gambetta, that "*le clericalisme, voilà l'ennemi*," yet the mere fact that the Vatican lays down its arms means a great deal, even if the hatchet may not be definitively buried. Moderate Republicans, those who go to church even if they do not believe what is said there, think they see in this action of the Holy Father a new source of strength for the Republic. And it seems to me that they are right, and that this view is the soundest. If the priesthood ceases its attacks on the political powers that be, and if these latter keep a sharp watch, which will be done while the Radical and Socialist elements are so strong in Chamber and Senate, the clerical party can be held in check, and the Republic will have so many less enemies, even if these quondam enemies are but lukewarm friends.

THEODORE STANTON.